



Negotiating Religious Diversity: Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Agents of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* in Multicultural Schools

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Received: 25 December 2025

Revised : 1 February 2026

Accepted: 14 February 2026

Published: 21 February 2026

To cite this article: Juaini, Achmad (2026). Negotiating Religious Diversity: Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Agents of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* in Multicultural Schools. *Wasilatuna : Jurnal Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam*, 9 Special Edition (1), 1–7.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role and strategies of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers as agents of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin da'wah* in a multicultural public senior high school in East Java, Indonesia. Amid rising identity polarization and social intolerance among adolescents, IRE teachers are increasingly required to move beyond conventional instruction toward communicative and inclusive pedagogical engagement. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and school principals, participatory classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal three interconnected roles enacted by IRE teachers: moral exemplars modeling compassionate conduct, facilitators of interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and integrators of universal Islamic values within formal learning processes. Strategies include dialogical and participatory instruction, community-based social projects, and the incorporation of local cultural wisdom to contextualize religious teachings. While curriculum constraints and social media dynamics present structural challenges, the multicultural school environment functions as a dynamic social laboratory for cultivating everyday practices of tolerance. This study contributes to religious education and Islamic communication scholarship by proposing a humanistic da'wah-based educational model grounded in persuasive, dialogical, and inclusive pedagogy, offering a contextual framework for strengthening religious moderation in pluralistic educational settings.

Keywords: Da'wah; Islamic Religious Education, Islamic Religious Education teachers, multicultural schools, *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a nation characterized by extraordinary religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, embodied in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) (Rini and Nurmalisa 2021; Ziduhu Laia 2024). Within the educational context, this plurality is reflected in multicultural schools where students from various religious and socio-cultural backgrounds interact daily (Hoon 2017; Jayadi, Abduh, and Basri 2022). These schools function as microcosms of Indonesia's plural society and serve as strategic spaces for cultivating tolerance, empathy, and social cohesion (Raihani, 2017; Samsul, 2023). However, without effective educational guidance, diversity may give

rise to identity-based tensions, particularly amid the rapid spread of exclusive and intolerant religious narratives through social media (Asrori, 2020; Nasution, 2022; Subchi et al., 2020). This digital era demands a more proactive communicative role from religious educators to ensure that inclusive values are not drowned out by polarized online content (Ilyas & Rahman, 2024). This condition highlights the need for an educational approach that moves beyond doctrinal transmission toward value internalization and inclusive engagement.

Within this context, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers occupy a strategic position. In addition to teaching religious subjects such as *aqidah*, *fiqh*, and *akhlak*, they function as moral educators and social agents who shape students' perspectives on diversity (Berglund 2011; Tuna 2022). Previous studies have examined the role of IRE teachers in character education and multicultural learning (Hidayat, 2016; Mahfud, 2019; Munir, 2020). However, these studies primarily focus on curriculum and instructional strategies, rather than explicitly positioning IRE teachers as agents of *da'wah* who operationalize the concept of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*-a Qur'anic principle (QS. Al-Anbiya [21]:107) emphasizing Islam as mercy for all creation-as a communicative and pedagogical framework in heterogeneous school environments.

Conceptually, this study draws on the understanding of *da'wah* not merely as formal preaching, but as a persuasive and dialogical communication process aimed at fostering ethical transformation in society. In contemporary Islamic communication scholarship, *da'wah* is increasingly interpreted as an educational and relational practice that emphasizes wisdom (*hikmah*), compassion, and social engagement rather than coercive or confrontational approaches. Within school settings, this perspective situates teachers as communicative actors whose everyday interactions embody and transmit religious values through example, dialogue, and pedagogical practice.

The concept of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*, derived from QS. Al-Anbiya [21]:107, provides the normative foundation for this communicative approach. Theologically, it frames Islam as a mercy for all creation; pedagogically, it implies the cultivation of empathy, justice, and inclusivity in social relations. When applied in multicultural education, this principle resonates with broader theories of multicultural citizenship and dialogical pedagogy (Banks, 2019), which emphasize mutual recognition, respect for diversity, and constructive engagement across differences. Thus, positioning IRE teachers as agents of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* *da'wah* connects Islamic theological values with contemporary educational theory and social practice.

To address this gap, this study was conducted at a Multicultural Public Senior High School (*SMA Negeri 1 Sukapura, Probolinggo*), East Java, Indonesia, a public senior high school renowned for its diverse student population and its location in a socio-culturally rich environment. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with three IRE teachers and the school principal, participatory classroom observations, and analysis of school documents. This research aims to analyze: (1) teachers' communicative understanding of the *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* concept, (2) the pedagogical and social strategies used to construct and internalize these messages among students, and (3) the strategies employed to address the challenges of digital intolerance and online religious narratives within a diverse educational setting. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic Communication scholarship by providing a model for strengthening religious moderation in pluralistic schools

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as agents of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* da'wah within a multicultural educational setting. A qualitative design was chosen because this research seeks to understand meanings, interpretations, communicative practices, and value internalization processes that cannot be adequately measured through quantitative indicators. The focus of the study lies in examining how da'wah values are constructed, communicated, and negotiated in everyday pedagogical interactions.

The research was conducted at a Multicultural Public Senior High School (*SMA Negeri 1 Sukapura*), Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia, a by religious and socio-cultural diversity. The school was selected through purposive sampling, as it represents a multicultural educational environment where students from different religious backgrounds interact within the same institutional framework. This context provides a relevant setting for analyzing inclusive da'wah communication practices.

The primary participants of this study were three IRE teachers who actively teach Islamic Religious Education. Supporting informants included the school principal and selected students representing both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds to obtain a comprehensive perspective on school interactions. Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in religious education and intercultural engagement within the school environment.

Data were collected through methodological triangulation consisting of: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews, (2) participant classroom observation, and (3) documentation analysis. The interviews were conducted to explore teachers' understanding of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*, their strategies in constructing inclusive religious messages, and their responses to digital religious challenges. Classroom observations were carried out to examine how da'wah values were communicated through verbal interaction, pedagogical methods, role modeling, and interfaith engagement practices. Documentation analysis included lesson plans (RPP), school policies, and extracurricular activity reports related to religious and social programs.

Given the growing influence of social media in shaping students' religious perspectives, this study also examined how teachers respond to online religious narratives. Particular attention was given to teachers' message construction strategies in countering intolerant digital content, thus situating the study within the framework of Digital Da'wah Communication.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Field notes and interview transcripts were coded thematically to identify patterns related to teachers' understanding, communicative strategies, and digital engagement practices.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, this study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. Data validity was strengthened by comparing interview findings with observation results and documentary evidence. Ethical considerations were maintained by obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring confidentiality of identities.

Through this qualitative case study approach, the research aims to generate in-depth and contextual insights into how *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* values are translated into

communicative practices within a multicultural school environment, particularly in the era of digital religious discourse.

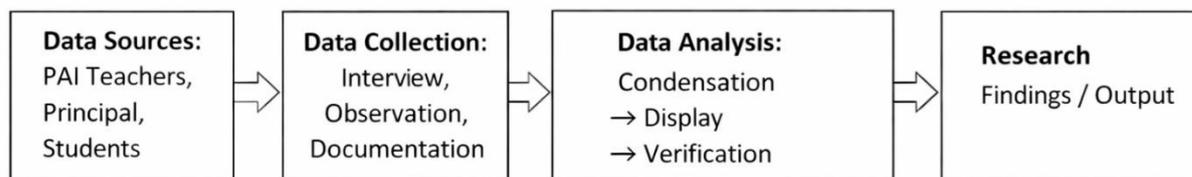


Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram

The research process followed a structured analytical flow, as illustrated in Figure 1. It began with the identification of research subjects through purposive sampling, focusing on IRE teachers as primary informants, supported by the school principal and selected students to ensure triangulated perspectives. Data collection was conducted concurrently using three techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore meaning construction and message strategies, participant observations to examine communicative interactions in classroom and school settings, and documentation analysis to review lesson plans and institutional policies related to religious education and social engagement.

The analytical phase followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), involving data condensation, thematic coding, data display, and conclusion drawing. Particular attention was given to identifying patterns of message construction, dialogical engagement, and digital da'wah responses employed by IRE teachers in addressing diversity and online religious narratives. This structured flow ensured that the findings were grounded in empirical evidence and systematically analyzed within a communication-oriented framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* da'wah at SMA Negeri 1 Sukapura (multicultural public senior high school) reveals a complex communicative process where IRE teachers act as the primary "encoders" of moderate messages. Following the interactive model of analysis, the findings and discussion are integrated into the following thematic pillars:

1. IRE Teachers as Communicative Models of Da'wah

The study found that the most effective da'wah at SMA Negeri 1 Sukapura is non-verbal, manifested through "behavioral messages." IRE teachers do not merely deliver lectures; they position themselves as moral exemplars.

"During a break, an IRE teacher was seen conversing warmly with a Hindu student near the school canteen, showing no social distance. In class, the teacher consistently used the inclusive greeting "Selamat pagi dan salam sejahtera" before the Islamic greeting." Field Note (Observation, December 2025).

This evidence aligns with Susanti (2018), suggesting that in a multicultural setting, *da'wah bil-hal* (da'wah through action) is more resonant than *da'wah bil-lisan* (verbal). From a communication perspective, this is a form of high-context communication where the message of tolerance is embedded in the teacher's social persona. This modeling functions as a "living text" that students "read" more effectively than a formal syllabus.

2. Dialogic Pedagogy: Constructing Inclusive Messages

The classroom is transformed into a "discursive space" where values are not imposed but negotiated. IRE teachers employ a dialogic strategy to internalize *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* principles.

"I don't just tell them that Islam is peaceful. I ask them, 'How would you feel if you were a minority in a different country?' We build the message of mercy from their own empathy." Interview (Teacher A, December 2025)

This approach reflects Banks' (2019) multicultural framework and the Qur'anic principle of *mujadalah bi al-lati hiya ahsan* (arguing in the best manner). Furthermore, the integration of these values in a multicultural setting proves that IRE learning is no longer just about doctrine, but about promoting universal harmony (Fakhrurrozi & Ma'arif, 2023; Samsul, 2023). By using Reflective Questioning, teachers are performing message construction that allows students to "decode" religious texts within a contemporary social context. This process ensures that students do not just memorize moderation but internalize it as a logic of communication in their daily social interactions.

3. Digital Da'wah Communication: Countering Intolerance

Addressing the Wasilatuna Scope (Point 7), this study highlights how IRE teachers navigate the "digital noise" of intolerant narratives. Teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Sukapura act as digital gatekeepers.

"Students often bring TikTok videos that claim certain rituals are 'bid'ah' or 'haram.' Instead of banning the phone, I use the projector to show the video and we deconstruct the message together. We analyze who made the content and what their goal was." Interview (Teacher B, December 2025)

This practice represents a sophisticated form of Digital Da'wah Communication. This proactive digital mediation reflects the enduring relevance of cultural da'wah, adapted for the 21st century. As argued by Hakim (2025), the 'Walisongo' model of cultural adaptation remains essential in the digital era, where teachers must transform theological messages into accessible, inclusive, and culturally-resonant digital content. This is consistent with Nasution (2022), who notes in Wasilatuna that the transformation of Islamic communication in the new media era requires educators to act as mediators between virtual religious narratives and theological moderation. The IRE teacher's strategy follows a counter-narrative logic. Instead of using reactive-confrontational language, teachers employ 'empathy-based framing.' By recontextualizing exclusive religious texts into the framework of 'universal mercy' (*Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*), the teachers successfully shift the students' perception from a rigid theological binary to a more fluid social-ethical understanding. This is a crucial shift from being a passive consumer of digital content to becoming a critical communicator of religious values.

4. Social Projects as Embodied Communication and Symbolic Interaction

The "Social Project" is the practical evidence of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*. At SMA Negeri 1 Sukapura, these projects act as a medium of communication between different faith groups.

"When the IRE students organized the 'Bakti Sosial' (Social Service), they invited us to help distribute the packages. It didn't feel like a 'Muslim-only' event. It felt like a school event where we were all 'Mercy' for the neighborhood." Interview (Non-Muslim Student, December 2025).

This interaction proves that da'wah can be a collaborative project that embodies the 'mercy' of Islam. According to Al-Faruqi (2000), da'wah must be responsive to social realities. In this context, these projects serve as a form of Symbolic Interactionism where humanitarian action becomes a shared universal language among diverse religious groups (Samsul, 2023). These projects are a form of Symbolic Interactionism where the symbols of "Islamic Mercy" are translated into the universal language of "Humanitarian Action." The school environment functions as a "social laboratory" where the abstract concept of *Rahmatan* is validated through tangible social experience.

5. Summary of Communication Strategies

To synthesize the findings, the following table illustrates the multifaceted communication strategies identified in the field:

Table 2. Micro-Level Communication Strategies of IRE Teachers in Multicultural Da'wah

Strategy	Communication Channel	Message Construction	Goal
Exemplary (Bil-Hal)	Interpersonal / Non-verbal	Behavioral Modeling	Social Trust & Bonding
Dialogic Pedagogy	Classroom / Verbal	Reflective Questioning	Cognitive Empathy
Digital Gatekeeping	Social Media/ Digital	Counter-Narrative Analysis	Critical Media Literacy
Social Projects	Collaborative Action	Shared Humanitarian Symbols	Social Integration

The table 2 above illustrates that the transformation of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* values at SMA Negeri 1 Sukapura is not a monolithic process. Instead, it is a multi-layered communication strategy that addresses different dimensions of student life. By utilizing various channels ranging from non-verbal interpersonal interactions to digital media deconstruction IRE teachers ensure that the message of inclusive Islam is not only understood cognitively but also practiced socially.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* values transcends traditional pedagogical boundaries, establishing a Holistic Model of Inclusive Communication. By shifting the understanding of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* from a static theological concept into an "Adaptive Da'wah Communication" framework, this research reveals that the model operates through three strategic communicative layers: Personal Modeling (non-verbal/high-context communication), Dialogic Message Construction (negotiating religious meaning in the classroom), and Digital Gatekeeping (countering intolerant narratives through media literacy). The theoretical contribution of this study highlights that IRE teachers in multicultural settings do not merely function as instructors, but as "Communicative Mediators" who bridge the gap between exclusive scriptural interpretations and the lived reality of a pluralistic society. Consequently, the success of moderate da'wah in the digital age depends on "Empathy-based Framing," where religious messages are reconstructed to prioritize social-ethical values over rigid doctrinal binaries. Thus, *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* serves as a transformative communication paradigm that fosters social resilience and interreligious harmony within the educational ecosystem.

However, this study is limited by its specific focus on a single multicultural public school in East Java, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other contexts with different demographic or cultural characteristics. Based on these findings and limitations, several strategic recommendations are proposed. Educators and IRE teachers are encouraged to adopt a "Critical Da'wah Literacy" approach, utilizing controversial digital content as a "clarification laboratory" rather than avoiding it. Furthermore, school policymakers should institutionalize "Intercultural Communicative Spaces" through joint social-humanitarian projects to shift multiculturalism from theory to lived experience. Finally, to deepen the scope of Communication Studies, future research should expand into "Digital Ethnography" to track how students re-encode inclusive messages into their private social media circles, as well as conducting comparative studies between urban and rural schools to understand how local cultural contexts affect the delivery of *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* messages.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used Gemini ai for language refinement and structural organization. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, and originality of the final version.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Achmad Djuaini: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing-Original Draft, and Writing-Review & Editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Principal, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers, and students of SMA Negeri 1 Sukapura (The Multicultural Public Senior High School in Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia) for their permission, cooperation, and valuable insights during the data collection process. Appreciation is also extended to Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wadda'wah, Indonesia for the academic support provided for this research.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Funding Statement

This research received no external funding from any agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Ethical Approval Statement

The author confirms that this study adheres to ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, no human or animal subjects were harmed, and no patient-identifying information was used.

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